

Librarians Protest

IRS Checking Readers Of Books on Explosives

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Treasury Department invasion of privacy that agents have started wide-

spread efforts to identify the readers of library books on explosives and sometimes other subjects that strike investigators as "militant and subversive."

The project apparently began at least two months ago, ostensibly as an investigative technique in enforcing federal gun control legislation which also covers bombs and other "destructive devices."

In Milwaukee, according to one librarian, a government agent hinted that the records might be subpoenaed unless local officials opened up their files. In suburban Atlanta, another investigator reportedly suggested that failure to cooperate would smack of disloyalty.

Officials of the American Library Association have sharply denounced the practice, calling it an ominous

threatens every American.

The apparently systematic effort was detailed yesterday by Reese Cleghorn, editor of the Southern Regional Council's magazine, South Today. Librarians in Milwaukee and Atlanta and library association spokesmen confirmed the reported visits by Treasury agents.

"Personally I find this whole thing very frightening," said Judith Krug, director of the association's Office for Intellectual Freedom in Chicago.

Compilation of the lists has been undertaken by agents of the Treasury's Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Division, an arm of the Internal Revenue Service.

An IRS spokesman defended the effort yesterday but said he did not know what prompted it.

"As far as I know, it's just routine," said Phil Rothschild, acting IRS information director. "The only thing special is that some librarian complained about it."

In most cases, IRS agents appear to have no specific books or borrowers in mind although an investigator asked one DeKalb County library branch, near Atlanta, about the readers of two books, "Guerilla Warfare" by Che Guevara and "The Age of the Guerilla" by Francois Sully.

Rothschild described the project as "just a continual building of information . . . in line with the proliferation of bombings across the country."

'Certain Information'

Harold Serr, director of the IRS Firearms Division, told South Today that his office had been asked by Sen. McClellan's Senate Investigations subcommittee "to collect certain information on explosives, the number of bombs and so on." Rothschild denied that the check of book borrowers was

important to be able to track down the perpetrators. He let me know he thought we should cooperate."

10 to 15 Names

Miss Maddox took the position that the library's records were confidential, but was overruled by the Milwaukee city attorney's office, apparently, she said, after a visit there by the IRS. She said government agents poured over thousands of library call slips and evidently came up with 10 to 15 names.

Libraries in and around Atlanta were visited last week.

Mrs. Tomlin E. Brown, the librarian in charge of DeKalb County's Avis G. Williams branch, said a Treasury investigator stopped in last Wednesday to see whether it possible "to identify the users of certain militant and subversive material. When I told him it would necessitate reading hundreds of thousands of feet of microfilm, he asked me if it would be possible to identify (future readers) by flagging books in a certain way."

At that, Mrs. Brown said, "I hit the roof. People who come into my library to read a book aren't going to have to worry about somebody telling Big Brother. He asked me whether I meant to tell him that I would allow people to walk into a library and read books with the purpose of overthrowing the government. I said that was a loaded question, like asking when did you stop beating your wife."

IRS officials in Washington insisted they knew of "no pressure" on librarians to cooperate, and said court subpoenas would not be used although Milwaukee's Miss Maddox said she distinctly recalled the threat of one. "If it's a matter of public record, we look," Rothschild said. "If it isn't, we don't look."

American Library Association officials said they plan to propose that members permit no looks without a court order. "If this (IRS practice) goes through," said executive director David Clift, "What's to prevent them from walking into your home or my home and saying, 'let's see your books.'"

prompted by any directive from IRS headquarters, however.

As a result, he said, he had no idea of how many cities might be involved. Rothschild said he assumed IRS field agents simply would check the names they come up with against "our suspect list or a suspect list in their field office."

The Milwaukee Public Library was evidently one of the first systems approached, causing a public but apparently isolated controversy first reported in the Milwaukee Sentinel more than a month ago.

Assistant Librarian Vivian Maddox recalled yesterday that agent Michael Geraty stopped by in early May after singling out about 30 books on explosives available there.

"He called our attention to some of the unrest in recent years. He said it was